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\$75,000 Southern Park Stakes the first of 2021 Ohio Thoroughbred Race Fund events

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by Kimberly Rinker, *Ohio Thoroughbred Race Fund*

The 2021 stakes season for Ohio-bred Thoroughbreds kicks off this Saturday (March 20) with the sixth running of the \$75,000 Southern Park Stakes at Mahoning Valley Racetrack. Post time for the featured event—race six—is set at 2:34 pm, ET. Post time for the first race on the eight-race card is 12:15 pm, ET.

The six-furlong contest for Ohio-registered 3-year-old fillies is named in honor of Southern Park, a racetrack that operated 107 years ago in nearby Boardman, OH, and later slipped into oblivion as did so many tracks during the Great Depression.



Esplanade after her victory in the 2020 Hoover Stakes

A full field of 12 sophomore fillies are set to break from the Mahoning gate with three-time winner **Esplanade** the clear standout. This dark bay filly, a daughter of Daredevil-Southern Silence, by Dixie Union makes her 2021 debut in the Southern Park Stakes for owners Winstar Farm, Blazing Meadows Farm and Michael Lewis and trainer Tim Hamm.

A winner of \$170,460 in her career, Esplanade took her maiden victory handily for these connections, winning impressively by six lengths on June 17 at Belterra. She quickly followed that up with a wire-to-wire score in the \$75,000 Hoover Stakes at Belterra on July 3, and graced the winner's circle once more on Aug. 8, this time at JACK Thistledown, in the \$100,000 Best of Ohio Cleveland Kindergarten Stake. In her final start as a 2-year-old, Esplanade finished a smart second to Venquist in the \$250,000 Spinaway Stakes (Gr1) at Saratoga on Sept. 6.

Erik Barbaran will ride Esplanade, who carries high weight of 122 pounds in the Southern Park.

Originally christened Southern Park Trotting Track, the once half-mile oval featured Thoroughbred, Standardbred, greyhound, auto racing and flying exhibitions, as well as school track meets. Many runners shipped into the track via direct railway lines, and accommodations were constructed for trainers, owners, grooms and jockeys.

The inaugural 2015 Southern Park Stakes saw Robert Gorham's Justalittlesmoke win in 1:10.69 with jockey Terry Houghton up, while the 2016 edition saw Barefoot Gypsy score in 1:14.55 with jockey Albin Jimenez riding for trainer Wesley Ward.

In 2017, it was the seemingly indefatigable Nikki My Darling who won the third calling of the Southern Park Stakes, in 1:15.64 for trainer Jeff Radosevich and jockey Luis Colon.

Trainer William Cowans saddled both the winner and second-place finisher in the 2018 edition of the Southern Park Stakes when Tango Run sprinted to a modest 1:14.85 clocking for jockey Rex Stokes, III, with stablemate Fancy Feelin second best for rider William De La Cruz.

Totally Obsessed captured the 2019 Southern Park Stakes for trainer Gary Johnson and owner Ron Paolucci in 1:14.67 with jockey Luis Quinones in the irons. Unraced in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Southern Park is the starting venue for the Buckeye State's 2021 Ohio Thoroughbred Race Fund (OTRF) stakes season.